



**MyVA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES FOR JULY 14-15, 2015**

The MyVA Advisory Committee (MVAC) convened its meeting on July 14-15, 2015, at the Washington DC VA Medical Center

**Committee member(s) present:**

General Josue "Joe" Robles – Chairman (via VTC)  
Dr. Michael Haynie – Vice Chairman  
Mr. Herman Bulls  
Ms. Teresa Carlson  
Dr. Richard Carmona  
Dr. Delos (Toby) Cosgrove  
Dr. Laura Herrera Scott  
Dr. Christopher (Chris) Howard (absent 1 day)  
Ms. Nancy Killefer  
Mr. Fred Lee  
Ms. Regina Reaves  
Ms. Maria (Lourdes) Tiglao  
Mr. Robert Wallace (absent 1 day)

**Committee member(s) absent:**

Dr. Eleanor (Connie) Mariano

**Agency representative(s) participating:**

Mr. Robert McDonald – Secretary  
Mr. Sloan Gibson – Deputy Secretary  
Mr. Robert Snyder – Executive Director, MyVA  
Mr. Scott Blackburn – Director, MyVA  
Ms. Debra Walker – Designated Federal Officer

**Presenter(s) and other participant(s):**

Dr. David Shulkin – Under Secretary for Health  
Ms. LaVerne Council – Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology  
Mr. Danny Pummil – Principal Under Secretary for Benefits  
Dr. Carolyn Clancy – Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health  
Mr. Ronald Walters – Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs  
Mr. Tom Allin – MyVA Chief Veterans Experience Officer  
Mr. Matt Collier – MyVA Strategic Partnerships Lead  
Mr. Tom Muir – MyVA Support Services Excellence Lead  
Ms. Stacey Vasquez – MyVA Performance Improvement Lead  
Ms. Gina Farrisee – Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration (HRA)  
Mr. Mike Haith – Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for HRA  
Mr. Chris O'Connor – Acting Assistant Secretary, Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs  
Ms. Leigh Bradley – General Counsel



Ms. Linda Schwartz – Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning  
Ms. Laura Eskenazi – Chair, Board of Veterans Appeals  
Ms. Lea Holcer – MyVA PMO Communications Lead  
Ms. Jill Draime – VHA Acting Chief of Staff  
Ms. Todd Livick – VHA Communications  
Mr. Joe Williams – Acting VISN 5 Director  
Mr. Lew Boone – VBA Senior Communications Advisor  
Ms. Deb Kramer – MyVA Fusion Cell Lead  
Mr. Chuck Hume – VHA IT  
Ms. Janet Murphy – VHA Operations  
Ms. Laurie Park – Deputy Assistant Secretary for Finance  
Ms. Lisa Thomas – VHA Human Resources  
Ms. Donna Gage – VHA Chief Nursing Office  
Dr. Tracy Gaudet – VHA Director of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation  
Ms. Beth McCoy – VBA Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations  
Ms. Sam Retherford – Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Ms. Mike Feil – MyVA Project Management Office, HRA  
Mr. Rod Scott Ward – MyVA Project Management Office  
Ms. Lisa Dial-Bell – MyVA Communications Team  
Ms. Margarita Devlin – Executive Director, Interagency Care and Benefits Coordination  
Ms. Martin Taylor – Communications, Office of the Secretary  
Ms. Michelle Gardner-Ince – MyVA Support Services Team  
Mr. Jeffrey Moragne – Director, Advisory Committee Management Office  
Ms. Jelessa Burney – Program Analyst, Advisory Committee Management Office  
Mr. Walt Cooper – Chief of Staff, Veteran Experience Office  
Ms. Marina Martin – Chief Technology Officer  
Mr. Josh Taylor – Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs  
Mr. Joshua Jacobs – Special Assistant to the Secretary  
Mr. Mark Bailey – National Association of Government Employees  
Ms. Christine Polnak – Service Employees International Union  
Ms. Irma Westmoreland – National Nurses Union  
Mr. James Martin – American Federation of Government Employees  
Mr. Calvin Scott – National Federation of Federal Employees



## **DAY 1**

**Day 1 of the MVAC meeting started at 8:00 a.m. with a closed session which included a tour of the Washington DC VA Medical Center for Committee members to experience VA care in action.**

### **Welcome/Tour:**

VA Medical Center Director Mr. Brian Hawkins and Acting VISN 5 Director Mr. Joe Williams met the Committee members, the Secretary, and Deputy Secretary and welcomed them to the Washington DC VA Medical Center. This welcome was followed by programmatic briefings prior to the MyVA Advisory Committee (MVAC) touring the facility. The MVAC toured the VA Medical Center until 12:00p.m.

The tour was completed, and a debrief was provided to the advisory committee after lunch.

### **Welcome/Open Meeting**

The public session of the meeting opened at 2:00pm with Chairman Robles opening the meeting and Committee members providing brief self-introductions.

Secretary McDonald and Deputy Secretary Gibson provided an update on progress since the last meeting, followed by Mr. Robert Snyder and Mr. Scott Blackburn giving an overview of the role, scope, and activities of the Advisory Committee and explained how the next two days would proceed. (Slides 7-9) They also shared with the MVAC and the audience what a successful MVAC meeting would involve, and some of the discussions from the April 2015 meeting, and how VA is moving forward with them. (Slides 10/15)

Mr. Blackburn shared the senior leadership changes since the April MVAC meeting that included departures, and new leadership members to include: Mr. Rob Nabors, Chief of Staff; Dr. David Shulkin, Under Secretary for Health; Ms. LaVerne Council, Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and Chief Information Officer; and Mr. Greg Giddens, Principal Executive Director, Office of Acquisitions, Logistics, and Construction. (Slide 16)

Mr. Snyder and Mr. Blackburn shared the progress that VA is making in the five work streams (improving the Veteran experience, improving the employee experience, achieving support services excellence, creating a culture of continuous performance improvement, and enhancing strategic partnerships) and acknowledged that VA still has challenges remaining such as customer service issues, supply chain and contracting issues, budget shortfalls, and hiring. (Slides 17-18)

### **MyVA Implementation Plan Overview**

Mr. Bob Snyder and Mr. Scott Blackburn provided an overview of the MyVA Integrated Plan and where VA is with progress made to date and the current areas of focus. Progress to date includes cross-functional, cross-organizational team establishment; broad engagement with stakeholders; and execution of a series of board, all employee communications, to mention a few. Some of the current areas of focus are finalizing the MyVA Integrated Plan; embedding



MyVA into traditional government processes; and establishing MyVA communities. A timeline was provided for the July 29, 2015 release of the plan and how it will be executed in multiple horizons to achieve its ultimate mission. (Slides 23-25)

The Plan has three integrated elements, or horizons. First, VA plans to leverage the existing programs and initiatives that are delivering better services and benefits to Veterans. There is already a great deal of positive transformation taking place in VA and those efforts must be exploited and leveraged. While these efforts provide a solid base to build from, the improvements are not sufficient. Thus, the second horizon of the transformation concentrates on a relatively small set of catalytic efforts focused on five initial priorities. They will accelerate the transformation that is now underway, and we should expect to see significant and demonstrable progress in these targeted areas between now and the end of 2016. (Slide 26)

These initial priorities include:

- Improving the Veterans experience. At a bare minimum, every contact between Veterans and VA should be predictable, consistent, and easy. VA is aiming to make each touch point exceptional.
- Improving the employee experience. VA employees are the face of VA. They provide care, information, and access to earned benefits. They serve with distinction daily.

While improving the Veteran and employee experiences are central to our efforts, three complementary efforts will help build more robust management systems, enhance productivity, and deliver more effective results.

- Achieving support services excellence will let employees and leaders focus on assisting Veterans, rather than worrying about “back office” issues.
- Establishing a culture of continuous performance improvement will apply lean strategies to help employees examine their processes in new ways and build a culture of continuous improvement.
- Enhancing strategic partnerships will allow us to extend the reach of services available for Veterans and their families.

The third horizon is optimizing and scaling successful initiatives from the previous horizons, and growing small wins into big ones. This horizon will extend into and beyond 2017.





Concurrent with and throughout all of the horizons, VA will focus on management reforms creating a high performing organization. VA will also invest in long-term capabilities that will enable sound strategies based on Veterans' needs, a high performing culture, passionate leadership, and robust management systems.

#### **What our Veterans Should Expect to See by December 2016? (Slide 27)**

Discussion was led by Mr. Snyder and Mr. Blackburn on what changes our Veterans should expect to see by the end of December 2016 that include completion of the Veterans Crisis Line improvements; a single, integrated customer-focused Web site; a VA311 phone number; use of Vet Centers to enhance points of service; and a modernized VistA, to mention a few expectations. Comments from the MVAC members on their expectations of what Veterans should expect to see in December 2016 include:

- Prioritize resources.
- Consider how to deploy and implement resources.
- Roll up priorities to the performance plan.
- Build groupings upon momentum of the work already done with the five work streams.
- Seek tangible, meaningful results for our Veterans.
- Put the voice of the customer at the front line.
- Have a tailored approach for reaching Veterans depending on where they live.
- Have Veterans as advocates for VA.

#### **What our Employees Should Expect to See by December 2016? (Slide 28)**

Further discussions were held regarding what VA employees should expect to see by the end of December 2016. Some of these expectations include greater level of employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity; approximately 10% of employees will be trained in Lean techniques; optimized support services; and implemented strategies in the areas of leadership excellence, engaging employees and improving VA's culture; improving human resources processes; and developing employees.

#### **What our Leadership Should Expect to See by December 2016? (Slide 29)**

The last discussion on expectations by December 2016 was for VA's leadership. Some of the expectations listed were clear governance, roles, responsibilities, and decision rights; an effective performance management system; a Strategic Partnership Needs Portfolio; and improved hiring, contracting and supply chain practices, and IT service support. Comments from MVAC members included:

- Contract for the gaps in leadership building capacity.
- Define the list considerably.
- Be specific about "senior leadership."



### **MyVA Implementation Plan Comments/Feedback:**

Overall comments provided on the MyVA Implementation Plan from MVAC members include the following:

- Leverage information technology.
- Engage employees.
- Increase and improve internal and external communications.
- Utilize knowledge management tools.
- Simplify everything we do.
- Simplify and clarify expectations from leadership.
- Engage millennials.
- Prioritize resources.
- Provide an executive summary of the MyVA Integrated Plan.
- Replicate the Ambassador Program in other areas in VA.
- Create an HR leadership development plan.
- Develop a medical center change plan.
- Badge/celebrate small successes – use of coins.
- Place the work streams with each part of the diagram that it belongs to.
- Plan the audience.
- Develop and maintain strategic partnerships.
- What do we give up if everything is not funded?
- What are the gaps in the Venn diagram?

The Top 10 most common questions or concerns about MyVA that staff heard from employees were presented, and responses to date shared. Some of the questions/concerns include: resourcing; are the Administrations on board; are we taking on too much; and how are we measuring/tracking success? (Slides 30-31)

There was a breakout exercise that included small groups that discussed one of three questions, and then reported back to the group. The three questions presented were: what are the critical things that VA should focus on achieving over the next 10 months; what are VA's biggest risks to success and how long should we mitigate; and why does VA really need to make these changes stick? Upon completion, each group provided a briefing of their discussion group. (Slide 32)

**Day 1 Closing remarks were provided by Chairman Robles and Secretary McDonald and the meeting was adjourned at 5:15p.m.**





## DAY 2

**Day 2 of the MVAC meeting opened at 8:30 a.m.**

### **Welcome:**

Chairman Joe Robles opened the meeting with welcoming remarks and appreciation of the Committee members for the work done on day one. (Slide 36)

Mr. Blackburn started the day with three videos showcasing VA in the news from Seattle, Georgia, and Johnson City. (Slide 37)

Mr. Blackburn further discussed the upcoming roundtable discussions and how they would be conducted. The purpose of the roundtables was for VA leadership to leave with ideas that would help them lead over the next several months. Discussions were designed to ask VA what it needs to keep doing, what it needs to stop doing, what it needs to start doing, and where it needs adjustment. Also, what are the highest priorities to deliver over the next 6 months and how do we move toward implementation/execution? Groups were then dispersed to work on their respective discussions in various locations. The three roundtable discussions were: communicating to our employees; optimizing support services; and leading change from the front line. The public and other attendees had the opportunity to sit in on the roundtables. (Slides 38-39)

### **Roundtable: Leading Change from the Front Lines (Slide 41)**

**Moderator:** Ms. Nancy Killefer

### **Participants:**

- Dr. Mike Haynie, MVAC
- Mr. Fred Lee, MVAC
- Ms. Jean Reaves, MVAC
- Dr. Carolyn Clancy, VHA
- Ms. Donna Gage, VHA
- Mr. Mike Galloucis, MyVA
- Dr. Tracy Gaudet, VHA
- Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson
- Ms. Beth McCoy, VBA
- Mr. Sam Retherford, HRA
- Ms. Stacy Vasquez, MyVA



**Highlights:**

- VA currently has a culture of fear. Employees are hesitant to admit errors/mistakes because of fear of punitive actions.
- There is a lack of consistent training that leaves employees with the proper tools to represent VA and leads to mistakes.
- VA needs to find the balance between encouraging employees, and properly train/educate them, to learn from their mistakes and take accountability for mistakes when they occur.
- VA does not have an institutional inventory of best practices that can be shared between all VA facilities. It would be beneficial for all of VA to know and understand what successful actions have been undertaken and what can be replicated. An inventory would enable this.
  - Peer-to-Peer knowledge would be a key component of this inventory.
- VA currently does not do a good job of communicating internally to employees. It needs to develop one that is internal and external, and driven by local VA facilities.
- VA should grow leaders throughout their career (like the Department of Defense (DoD) does).
- VA needs to provide front-line training on answering phones to have the bandwidth to properly answer all calls. There is nothing worse, from a Veteran's perspective, than having his/her phone call unanswered. VA needs a technology and training investment with this issue.
- VA front-line employees are the ambassadors of VA, so customer training must be everyone's experience.
- Front-line employees must have some authority with responsibility. Most VA employees would love to have this in a culture that doesn't inappropriately punish for mistakes.
- Success is defined on local levels. VA must bring exceptional front-line training to the local areas and to all employees in those areas (from the most junior position to the most senior one). Veterans define successful experiences at these levels, so this is very important.





- It may prove beneficial to study how the United Kingdom successfully measures customer experience. This may provide some benefits to VA.

### **Roundtable Discussion – Optimizing Support Service (Slide 42)**

**Moderator:** Mr. Herman Bulls

**Participants:**

- Ms. Teresa Carlson, MVAC
- Dr. Richard Carmona, MVAC
- Dr. Chris Howard, MVAC
- Ms. LaVerne Council, OIT
- Ms. Gina Farrisee, HRA
- Ms. Danny Pummill, VBA
- Ms. Chuck Hume, VHA
- Mr. Tom Muir, MyVA
- Ms. Janet Murphy, VHA
- Ms. Laurie Park, OM
- Ms. Lisa Thomas, VHA
- Mr. Ron Walters, NCA
- Ms. Marina Martin, CTO

**Highlights:**

Mr. Tom Muir, MyVA Support Services Lead, started off by level setting the group.

- According to OMB's results of VA's ranking on customer satisfaction in the areas of HR, IT, Finance, Procurement and Real Property, VA is near the **bottom** in all but Finance, which ranks in the middle of other agencies.
- Consistently, VA is ranked by its own employees as not satisfied with these services.
- VA employees report none of these services are a strategic partner in supporting Veterans.
- As-Is effort validates these scores and demonstrates that VA is not standardized or integrated in these areas and confirms strong, shadow support service organizations.
- VA SSE is calling itself "support" services instead of "shared" services because it is not yet considering going outside of VA to receive these services. This is a distinguishing factor from the OMB definition, and guidance on achieving a shared service environment by outsourcing these services to other agencies. VA is trying to integrate services inside VA *BEFORE* going outside of VA.



- There are limited service level agreements (SLAs) in place for services.
- There are questions about who is support services' customer?
- Benchmarking is being conducted with other agencies, in particular, Commerce and NASA.
- Discussed concepts with the need to develop guiding principles, being principle based, not rules based.
- Ms. Farrisee of HRA confirmed that many disconnects exist in HR including many employees doing HR work do not have common standards, certifications, or training. Also, they do not have a line of accountability to HRA, so she has no authority to dictate standards. The HR Smart System and the HR Academy are being developed to help with some of this. VA is the only agency hiring under three different hiring authorities.
- Dr. Richard Carmona asked Ms. Farrisee where we can optimize? Ms. Farrisee responded that some functions need to be centralized – like classification. Some functions need to be pushed down to local facilities. Benchmarking is needed everywhere, and there is a lack of reporting and oversight.
- Governance will have to be put in place at the Deputy Secretary level to make decisions on what should be centralized and what should not be. Services can be integrated at multiple levels such as ... Federal, Department, Administration, and Local. Resist customers' cry that they are special and need custom services.
- Dr. Chris Howard asked about where we were in determining which elements are centralizable?
- In discussion around what services should be integrated/centralized first, Ms. Council firmly stated that IT should always be done first because all the other services will need IT services for their own centralization. There are many efficiencies gained early on which will then level off, and that there will be positive employee experiences that can be used as momentum for the other services to be integrated. She stated that Finance should be second to be able to have global budgeting, and that HR should be last because generally the processes are the least sophisticated causing integration issues. Mr. Danny Pummill stated that HR is not standardized within VBA and that it is causing major issues now. He also stated that HR has got to get to consistency as fast as possible.
- It was suggested that SSE should get benchmarks outside of government and that Commerce and NASA (in particular) are too small to be relevant to VA. A DoD comparison will be more relevant.



- A request was made to Mr. Muir to provide back to this group a page each showing the following information. No date was set for this.
  - The As-Is
  - The To-Be
  - Timeline
  - Barriers to success
  - Priorities
  - Measures of success

Ms. LaVerne Council, OI&T, started by stating that it is hard to attack IT without a vision.

- The 2006 integration of OIT has had no movement since 2006 and since that time, technology has passed VA by.
- There is a lack of investment in OIT people development, identifying what they are accountable for, and performance measures.
- Identifying owners of processes is a lynch pin in good IT.
- Good IT builds and deploys only what is needed and used and not what is possibly needed.
- All business partners need to have process owners and OIT will respect the business' priorities.
- She wants businesses to be a great customer to IT.
- VA needs to realign OIT to be a Fortune 10 enterprise with service level agreements in place, a strategic IT portfolio, account managers who work with the businesses, and a project management discipline in place.
- VA IT needs to stay "evergreen" and not get technology stale.
- She will figure out interoperability with the Department of Defense (DoD).
- MyVA is a great opportunity and people are urged not to bring "their baggage" to MyVA so that it can shine by focusing on the Veteran.
- There will be a cyber security vision and plan in place which will be a blend of rules and policies with goals at 6 months, 12 months, and 18 months.



- There will be an authoritative repository of Veteran data. She knows this will be a fight and it doesn't matter. It will happen and it will be secure and accurate.
- She will be fully engaged with VistA evolution strategy.
- Loves the idea of a 2-year budget lock because if there are any projects going on for more than 24 months, it is too long.
- Legacy systems have to be removed. The businesses need to work to tell OIT what is not needed.
- Having 8,000 people in OIT is a dream! She can do a lot with 8,000 people!
- It is crazy that VA employees work on legacy systems while the contractors work on the new development. This is one example of how OIT has not developed its employees.
- Employees spend most of their time managing away risk, not delivering results.
- VA needs to change how we provide telephony and Wi-Fi.
- She will put in place account managers to partner with each business who will work with business leaders to prioritize IT requirements. These account managers will know the business, security requirements, life cycle development, and IT governance. They will value transparency and measuring on a scorecard, and will have the courage to speak up when they see problems so that they can make decisions at the point of concern.

Comments/Questions to Ms. Council included:

- The organizational structure is a complete mystery to the organizations that are supposed to be customers.
- Mr. Pummill of VBA stated that the Congressional IT appropriation is limiting to Administration leadership. Ms. Council responded she felt that the current appropriation was more than sufficient.
- Dr. Chris Howard asked how many account managers does IT need? What do they need to do?

Ms. Council responded:

- IT needs account managers for each Administration and BVA.
- Account managers need to understand:
  - business
  - enterprise targets
  - development process (IT Lifecycle)
  - governance



- transparency
  - have courage to identify problems
  - solve problems at the point of concern
- Work to empower people to make decisions on the spot
- Ms. Teresa Carlson wanted to make sure Ms. Council sought out the good, the bad, and the ugly. Face the internal issues and identify the customer service issues. Good customer facing technology needs to include a different model of support for younger Veterans. VA OIT should develop integrators who deliver fast and great results. Take advantage of Veterans to determine the support they need.
  - Ms. Marina Martin commented on how disjointed intake of Veterans into the system is – that we have a fractured view of the VA from an IT point of view. Just getting a list of available benefits has been difficult.
  - Mr. Ron Walters of NCA urged caution when considering NCA because services are already integrated within NCA, and they are performing well. That while NCA has had excellent success on many fronts their results may not be scalable across all of VA. NCA has already capitalized on efficiencies and does not want to put this success at risk as the rest of VA evolves.
  - Ms. Laurie Park of Finance confirmed Mr. Muir's remarks as they relate to Finance in that there are 8 financial management systems that are not integrated and that a GS-3 level employee must work with all of them to be able to tell the Veteran how much money they need to pay for their medical care. This is valuable time spent on reconciling systems when it could be directed to better use.

#### **Roundtable Discussion: Communicating to our Employees (Slide 43)**

**Moderator:** Dr. Laura Herrera Scott

**Participants:**

- Dr. Toby Cosgrove, MVAC
- Ms. Lourdes Tiglao, MVAC
- Ms. Jill Draime, VHA
- Ms. Lea Holcer, MyVA
- Ms. Todd Livick, VHA
- Mr. Lew Boone, VBA
- Mr. Mark Bailey, NAGE
- Ms. Christine Polnak, SEIU



#### Highlights:

- Biggest complaint about communications is that the employees are not getting messages or the messages are diluted when they are finally delivered and do not match the intent of the originator (typically they were talking about messages from Secretary Bob McDonald).
- Ms. Tiglao stated that:
  - The message needs to be relevant and targeted vs. a broad message that is not specific enough.
  - The platform/medium needs to be considered and you must know your audience and tell her to deliver to that audience. She indicated that email is not the preferred way to communicate with an audience, since most emails go unread and not all employees have access to email.
- Chairman Robles stated that it is critical to have personnel trained on communications with respect to the mission, value, and strategies. He also stated that extraordinary communications must be performed at all levels of the organization in order to be successful.
- Mr. Brian Hawkins, Washington DC VAMC Director, stated that in order for communications to be successful, employees must contribute to it throughout the process. He further went on to say we must engage with people and must be aware of what they want and need to hear. We should empower people to communicate and management's role is to focus on engagement – it is all about engagement and you must build trust through your communications.
- Dr. Toby Cosgrove indicated that the key thing is to communicate, communicate, communicate - by any and all possible means. He went on to further state that you cannot communicate too much! It is also crucial that the communications/messaging flows top-down to the manager and that the manager communicates with the employees.
- Mr. Blackburn related a story that he picked up at a Cleveland Clinic conference he attended relative to a young lady that died in the ER. The ER Director asked the mother of the young lady what she wanted to do with the body only to find out no one had communicated to the mother that the daughter had died.
- Chairman Robles said that the first step in communications is internal in order to gain feedback from whomever your message is going to impact or change.
- Dr. Herrera Scott related an incident where she found out about a significant local medical issue within the state of Maryland from a CNN broadcast. She stated that it is





important that employees must not initially find out negative information from external sources and it is key to deliver the message immediately to employees.

- Mr. Lew Boone of VBA said VA must be aware of communications from the bottom to the top and that during his seven months on the job, he has witnessed that some employees are using communications the wrong way. Mr. Boone stated that it has taken a while for him to understand how VA runs and that communications is good in VBA but not in the rest of the organization.
- Ms. Deb Kramer of the MyVA Fusion Cell added that from her perspective communications must be uniform and the supporting actions by management are critical since management must lead by example.
- Secretary McDonald stated that VA has a responsibility to communicate both internally and externally and figure out how to do it as succinctly as possible. He also stated that we have to be humble and own our mistakes immediately. When asked by Dr. Cosgrove how often Secretary McDonald communicated to VA employees, Secretary McDonald indicated that there is no set schedule. Dr. Cosgrove stated that he ensures communications are frequent, especially external communications to various media outlets which he tries to do on a daily basis.
- Ms. Tiglao said the key is that the message must be curated by management and that most messages are heard from peers with plenty of storytelling and that based on her experience, VA employees are in need of communication.
- Ms. Jill Draime of VHA said that you cannot communicate enough and that most communications by employees is vocal and that communications occurs at church, in store, and that it is all face-to-face and vocal. Ms. Draime went on to state that it has to be recognized that it is a significant role of the manager to connect, and the training in communications competency is critical. VA has to make sure that given the vast set of stakeholders, that people have strong communication skills.
- Mr. Mark Bailey of National Association of Government Employees union indicated that employees typically come to the union first to ask questions about recent communications and messages. It has also been his experience that we have communications silos Central Office/VISNs, Medical Center/leadership/middle-management/employees with the employees being constantly confused. Mr. Bailey went on state that it is critical for VA to send the same message from the top of the organization to the bottom of the organization without filtering/diluting it because it results in the front line employees getting an unstructured message.



- In a general discussion it was agreed that in order to communicate, leadership must have the right tools, and that the key is to tell the truth. Do not dwell on pessimistic or optimistic platitudes. It was also generally agreed that it is imperative that communications must be significantly improve and must change in order for MyVA to be successful, and the lowest level of the organization must be effectively communicated with.
- Ms. Tiglao said from her own experience, employees need to be talked to, especially those in the ER and other similar high pressure positions since they may have little knowledge of MyVA given they have no time outside their busy schedules, and most have no computers to access.
- Ms. Lea Holcer added that she joined VA three years ago and she immediately noticed that the communications process was nothing but silos. As far as the MyVA effort, she stated that the communications group was her and two other people helping her, but they are not permanent and will go back to their parent organizations in the near future.
- Mr. Todd Livick, from VHA communications stated that the challenge is that when you are working on a strategic communication effort, other communications, and then other more pressing tasks interrupt a key strategic communication. Mr. Livick went on state that in most instances, the Public Affairs Officer's role is an additional duty above and beyond an individual's primary role. It is also important from his perspective to prepare after action reviews and lessons learned to ensure issues and gaps are identified.
- Mr. Josh Taylor of Public Affairs has been with VA for about 3 to 4 years and stated that he has a weekly communications leads meeting at VACO, but his primary focus is external media relations. Mr. Taylor states he does not know who owns employee communications in the organization. He also stated that external and internal communications are not integrated and that a lot of communications are done by individuals without communications training/skills. It was noted that in the old days, the VA had a formal public affairs training process, but that over time those dollars disappeared, and so did the training.
- Chairman Robles stated when he was appointed the USAA CEO, the first thing he did was bring in the individual in charge of public relations and told him that he would get all his direction from him to make sure it was from top to the bottom. USAA got internal people on board first to gain feedback and look at communications topics from the bottom up before going externally. Chairman Robles also said that awards are important and always focus on what we are doing right and to be inspirational.



- Ms. Holcer was introduced and demonstrated the new MyVA intranet site and the capability for employees to capture videos about how MyVA is impacting them. Ms. Holcer then went on to show a page with the instructions with respect to capturing and uploading videos.
- Ms. Tiglao remarked that this looks overly complex and was probably too complicated for most non-techies to do. Ms. Holcer replied that public affairs will help people who can't place an upload. Another individual stated that this is the first time he had heard of it and public affairs is not aware of this effort. It was agreed that in the future the instructions would be made far simpler, such that individuals could do the upload.
- Ms. Tiglao chimed in that there are not enough people to do the job and specifically (pointing to Ms. Holcer), and not enough people supporting MyVA to do the job given that Ms. Holcer is the only dedicated communications person on MyVA.
- Mr. Bailey reiterated that VA has to get better at communicating and have more management engagement with the employees. He stated that emails from Secretary McDonald are not good enough and that most communication is directed towards the white collar workers as opposed to the blue-collar workers, and they (blue-collar workers) have no vehicle to actually see emails since they lack access to a laptop/PC.
- An individual representing the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) stated that since most people have smart phones, and asked was there any thought about creating a MyVA App to bridge the gap with respect to communicating to employees who didn't have the extra cycles or the ability to access laptop/PCs. He then stated that there needs to be awards for employees, both locally and nationally, for outstanding efforts and the need to identify good stories about the VA from front-line personnel.
- Ms. Tiglao stated that VA should look into using analytics on list servers to see what is being looked at by employees. She went on to state that employees need to be the cheerleaders for the MyVA effort and that with a significant number of the employees using social media that should be a significant focus of the communications relationship. It will also make Secretary McDonald more accessible to the employees.
- The unidentified individual from the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) stated that more awards for employees that are doing outstanding effort needed to be created and they just should not be within local areas. There should be national awards and VA needs to do a better job of telling good stories to ensure the employees are aware nationally of local successes.



- Chairman Robles added that as the USAA CEO he realized that communications is more than public relations from the top to the bottom the organization. It is used to get people on board first, to look at how the information is absorbed from the bottom up. Further, he stated that in one experience after a video to employees and USAA members, he received over 300,000 responses over several months. Chairman Robles also said VA needs to emphasize what we are doing right and be inspirational.
- Additional comment relative to the uploading of videos to the new internal MyVA Web site from an individual associated with public affairs was that the public affairs officers (PAOs) were not aware that they were to assist in any way with video uploading.
- Dr. Herrera Scott closed the meeting by summarizing the key discussion takeaways:
  - Identify someone to own internal communications.
  - Leverage storytelling as a communications tool.
  - Be humble and own the mistake immediately when they are made.
  - Work on employee recognition/awards.
  - Secretary Bob McDonald is the messenger.

## **Roundtable Takeaways**

### **Leading Change from the Front Lines:**

- Remove barriers – currently a culture of fear and punitive actions.
- Use the lean program.
- Develop an inventory or repository of what actions have been done already.
- Use peer to peer knowledge.
- Develop and implement a communications plan that is internal and external, and locally driven.
- Provide an inspirational rollout with local customization.
- Review the United Kingdom health system.
- Fix the basics of answering phones first and then, the hiring process.
- Make customer training everyone's experience.
- Have authority with responsibility.
- Use a performance management system.
- Get things down to the lowest levels.

### **Optimizing Support Services:**

- What is the organization's current state, the desired state, and the obstacles that need to be removed?
- What is the timeline – where are we going – is it measurable – how do we monitor?



- Standardize and customize.
- Have a governance process at the Deputy Secretary level.
- Have no sacred cows.
- Revamp the current HR system which is fractured within the organization and therefore causes additional overhead and inefficiencies.
- Centralize processes.
- Benchmark to help refine opportunities.
- Benchmark with other government organizations, but also expand to other external organizations, using "best in class."
- Integrate finance systems that are antiquated and disjointed; align authority and responsibility; increase training on the systems.
- Use the "stay evergreen" system keep OIT strategies updated.
- Utilize account management in service level agreements.
- Include performance measurement plans in service level agreements.
- Align IT to support a Fortune 10 organization.
- Utilize the PMO concept.
- Focus on cyber security.
- Consider centralization versus decentralization.
- Consider the practices – metrics – risks – benefits.

#### **Communicating to our Employees:**

- Message filter down – control with matching behavior, transparency, and training.
- Benchmark Cleveland Clinic's communications process.
- Use employee awards on a local and national basis; use as a good news story which could be inspirational to others.
- Consider the "voice of the member/employee" – can potentially reach 300K a month with the use of Instagram, Snap Chat, and Twitter.
- Use cell phones for message delivery.
- Use MyVA app to communicate with employees.
- Have an analytics platform (external not internal).
- Use targeted messaging.
- Own communications.
- Use storytelling.
- Maximize use of the Secretary and Deputy Secretary for messaging.
- Communicate in multiple platforms – always.
- Message across business lines.
- Reach employees who do not have computers to ensure they receive messages.



- Have a message that is consistent and truthful.
- Staff current communications operations/offices as they are understaffed.
- Use YouTube for communications.
- Control the narrative and stay on message.
- Get champions behind the message.
- Triage messages appropriately with resources.
- Create legacies for the upcoming administration change.
- Move to a more strategic level – currently at the tactical level.
- Be more strategic and mindful.
- Use tailored messages to employees – how we do this can make or break us.
- Make sure everyone needs to know that it is okay to fail.
- Be humble and own the message.
- Use proactive messages/stories.
- Use the union to help with communicating the message.
- Have Public Affairs Officer huddles.
- Use survey analytics – pulse surveys.
- Secretary must be willing to review the communications structure and make bold changes where necessary.

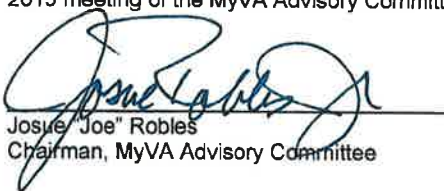
**Closing remark/comments was provided by Committee members and VA leadership.**

**Meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Debra A. Walker  
Designated Federal Officer, MyVA Advisory Committee

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes from the July 14 - 15, 2015 meeting of the MyVA Advisory Committee are true and correct.



Jose "Joe" Robles  
Chairman, MyVA Advisory Committee